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Terrorism Review

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12 November 1982

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GI TR 82-003
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Terrorism Review 3.5(c)

12 November 1982

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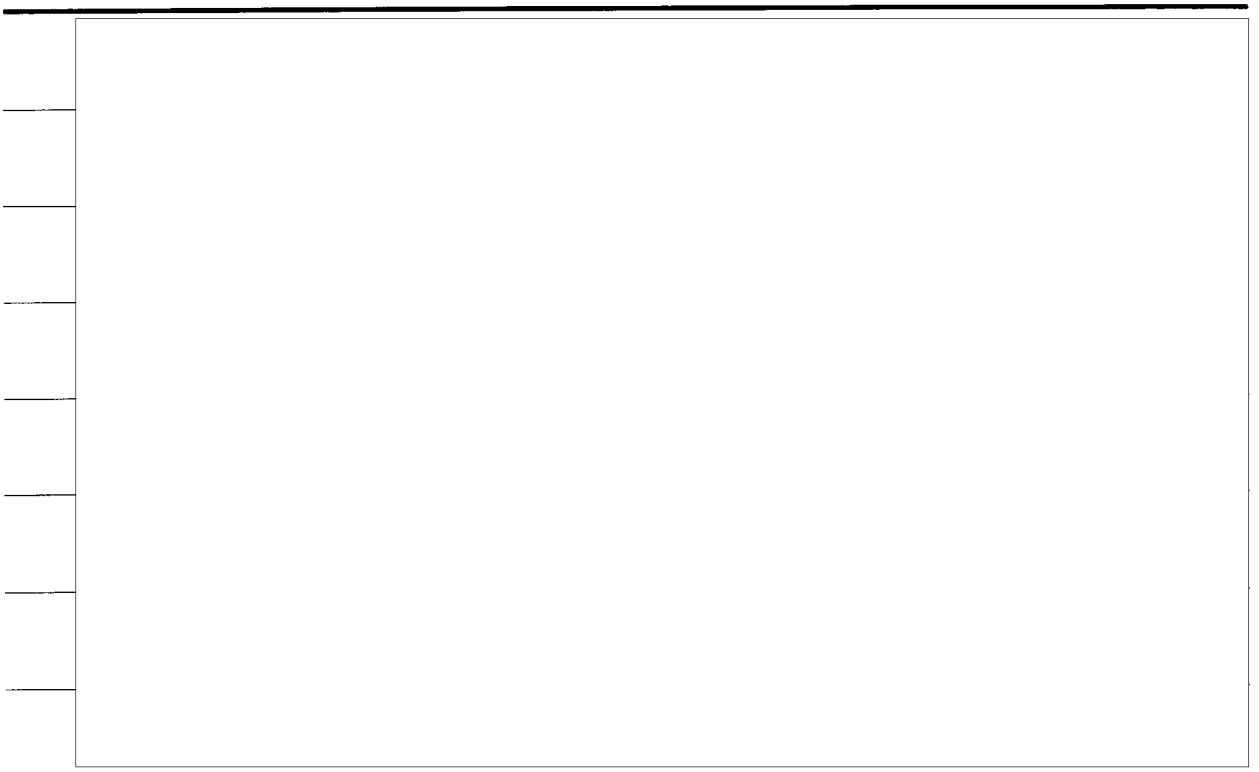

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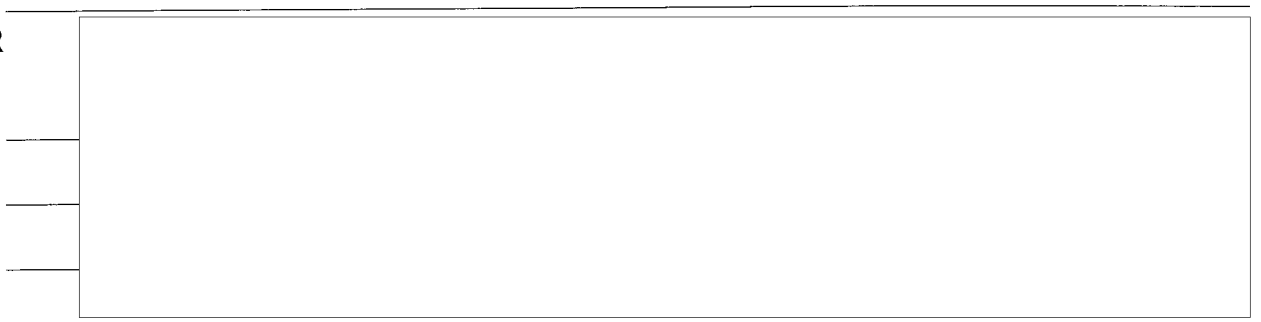

Comments and queries regarding this publication may be directed to the Research Director, Instability and Insurgency Center, Office of Global Issues, telephone 3.5(c)

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Group Study: The Montoneros of Argentina

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The Montoneros, among Latin America's most effective terrorists before being violently suppressed in the late 1970s, are preparing to become more active.

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Background

The Montoneros emerged in 1970 as the militant left wing of the umbrella Peronist movement under the leadership of then-exiled dictator Juan Peron. At Peron's bidding, they sought to undermine the incumbent military regime by raiding military barracks, robbing banks, and kidnaping both wealthy Argentines and foreigners in and around Buenos Aires. By 1973, however, the Montoneros were growing increasingly radical, calling for a "popular war" against the upper classes, and expanding operations into rural areas.

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they numbered some 2,500 combatants and 11,000 sympathizers. After Peron assumed the presidency in late 1973, he attempted to negotiate a halt to the terrorism, but the Montoneros refused to come to terms. By 1974 the split was complete, and the Peronist regime became the guerrilla's target. The Peronist government outlawed the Montoneros in mid-1975, and security forces moved against them.

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After ousting the Peronist regime in 1976, the armed forces had free rein against the Montoneros. Within three years the Army and intelligence services—employing torture, illegal detentions, and widespread dragnets—succeeded in forcing most of its members into inactivity or exile.

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by early 1977 combatants had already been reduced to about 300, and most of the leaders were captured, killed, or had fled the country. Any serious threat to the regime was eliminated, although sporadic attacks—including several sensational kidnapings and bombings—continued until 1979. By the end of that year, Montonero activists in Argentina were estimated at 200

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Their activities were confined to distributing leaflets, painting slogans on buildings in downtown Buenos Aires, and interrupting normal radio and television broadcasting with propaganda speeches.

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Current Status

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Montoneros in Argentina have maintained close contact with their

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network abroad, estimated in 1979

to number some 200. The exiles sought refuge in Latin America and

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Western Europe.

the Mexican Government and leftist parties in Western Europe have backed the Montonero propaganda campaigns, providing Mario Firmenich—a founder and leader of the Montoneros

—with forums for antiregime speeches and funds for printing and travel.

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in the case of Mexico, it fits the pattern of support for leftist groups. The favorable operational climate presumably accounts for the decision

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to base the Montoneros' political arm in Mexico City.

By 1980, the Montoneros, under Firmenich, divided into two groups—the clandestine operation in Argentina and the more open movement abroad.

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Firmenich's decision to separate militant from political action reflects ideological rifts within the movement. Veterans of the struggle, including Firmenich, were uncertain whether to continue armed confrontation, to build a popular base to support a potential political party, or to move forward on both fronts. In an effort to identify the organization with a legitimate party, Firmenich has renamed the Montoneros the Peronist Montonero Movement.

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Cuban Support

Cuba has provided training for recruits and a safehaven for Firmenich. the Castro regime also provided financial support, at least until September 1982, and safeguarded funds acquired by the Montoneros through their criminal activities. 3.5(c)

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Moreover, Havana has served as a staging area for Montoneros moving into Central America. Montoneros have worked with the Sandinistas in various operations, including the training of Costa Rican leftists and the assassinations of former Nicaraguan dictator Somoza in Paraguay. During the same period, Montoneros helped to train assassination teams for attacks on officials in El Salvador. 3.3(b)(1)

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Montoneros and the Transition

The uncertain political and economic situation in Argentina following the Falkland Islands defeat has improved the potential operational climate for the terrorists, who retain a capability to carry out attacks, should they decide to do so. as of late 1981 about 60 members were inside Argentina and an additional 300 were abroad. the organization has been revamped to facilitate political and military action. Four separate components deal with weapons and logistics; intelligence; counterintelligence; and political action, which includes propaganda activities and liaison with foreign terrorist and leftist political movements. All components are based outside Argentina; exiles in Havana take the lead in weapons and logistics, intelligence, and counterintelligence, while those in Mexico focus on political action.

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Inside Argentina, the Montoneros apparently are preparing to resume operations, anticipating the return of some overseas cadre. Caches of arms, including automatic weapons, grenades, and other explosives, have been uncovered as recently as January 1982, according to press and US Embassy reporting. In April, Montoneros may have been involved in several bombings in downtown Buenos Aires, according to US officials there.

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The Montoneros also appear to be stepping up their political activity. During the Falklands crisis, Firmenich publicly appealed to regime leaders to allow him to return to Argentina to join the struggle against the British and form a legitimate political party. The ruling junta refused.

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Prospects

The ability of the Montoneros over the next six to 18 months to capitalize on current conditions in Argentina and their enhanced military training and experience will be constrained by:

- Lack of public support. We judge that labor and political leaders currently believe their interests lay in assisting the regime through the transition process and not in backing or condoning violence that might delay elections. Potential student support is also uncertain.

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- Ideological rifts within the Montonero movement. We believe the lack of consensus on renewing violence could force Firmenich to focus on political action, at least until the effects of economic deterioration and the struggle within the military become more apparent.

- The willingness of outsiders to back a renewed insurgency. We judge that Cuba is withholding support to avoid alienating Buenos Aires at a time when diplomatic relations are improving as a result of Havana's aid during the Falklands. Moreover, the Cubans probably want the Montoneros to continue to concentrate on assisting insurgents in Central America rather than in Argentina. We believe Castro is unlikely to change his position any time soon.

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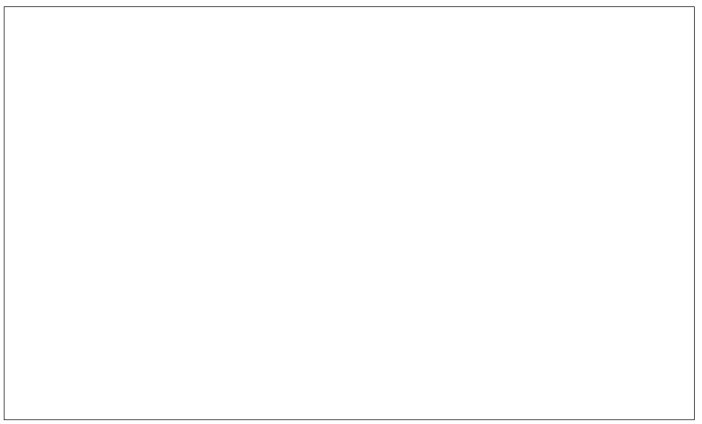

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We believe that, if the security forces are impaired significantly by continuing divisions within the military and if economic deterioration sparks serious social unrest, militants could be emboldened to renew terrorist activities. Without significant external support, however, we judge they would be unlikely to mount more than sporadic attacks against the government

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